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THE CRITICISM OF ART

In an article entitled "A Needed Profession," published in *ART AND PROGRESS* just three years ago, Mr. Frank Jewett Mather, Jr., made an appeal for critics of architecture, urging the necessity of a kindling of interest leading to the awakening of an intelligent public opinion, without which he claimed no great art has ever existed. That architecture is more in need of this service than the other fine arts is probably true, but obviously the requirement is not particular but general. Though much is written today about art there is a notable lack of thoroughly intelligent, thought-provoking criticism.

Curious as it may seem though art is a subject about which few among the general public profess to have much knowledge, yet in connection with a work of art almost all are ready to venture an opinion; personal appeal is sadly confused with merit in the average mind. The result is an amount of fulsome praise and no less thoughtless fault finding. Little achievements too often are exalted and great works ruthlessly disparaged.

Naturally this brings criticism into ill repute. Artists are not infrequently heard to condemn all criticism without reserve and though in so doing they are themselves guilty of the error they abhor their irritation is not without reason. A reputation in art is not easily earned and is never absolutely secure—genius is fitful—therefore praise or blame mean much to the artist—more many times than to the worker who can demonstrate by actual proofs the merit of his accomplishment.

There are some who for this and other reasons set aside all criticism, declaring it to be hurtful. But they are wrong. Nothing could be more helpful to art than its frank and free discussion. There will, of course, at times be blunders in judgment, owing to lack of perspective, but these breaches will be mended in good season and only temporary harm be done. That in which people are interested will of necessity be brought forward for discussion. If art is not talked about in our market places and our drawing rooms it is because as a people we are still indifferent to its charm. And until we learn to care about art we can not expect to be an art producing nation. As Mr. Jewett has well said every notable artistic accomplishment implies an eager and intelligent economic demand. To engender this demand through training and leadership is the part of criticism.

And after all the requirements of competency are not insuperable. The first, probably, is a reverence for art itself and somewhat lowly attitude of mind, after which come knowledge of certain fundamental principles and an open-eyed

receptivity. The critic does not claim infallibility—he rarely, if he is wise, poses as a prophet—but he can and should point the way, elucidate, interpret. There are a great many persons who desire this kind of leading, not a few of whom, once instructed, become leaders themselves. By no other means can an intelligent public be secured.

Criticism apart from examples loses much of its value and force, but with the multiplicity of exhibitions and the prevalence of good low-priced reproductions of famous works this today is quite unnecessary. Probably at no time in the past in this country has so much attention been given to the study of art. It is taught in a measure in the public and private schools throughout the land as well as in some of our universities. The women's clubs in every section of the United States are giving it serious consideration; it is a leading topic among the extensive reading circles of the West. For this reason it finds its place in the press, into the magazines and finally into book form. In America today there are a few able critics, and they are rendering a great service in the cause of art. But there should be more. Where are they to come from? Will our universities undertake to train them or will our museums accept the responsibility? If we are not to make art a mere fashion or think of it as a trade we must have more intelligent, trained, as well as sympathetic, art criticism.

CHARLES RUSSELL HEWLETT

Charles Russell Hewlett, Dean of the School of Applied Design of the Carnegie Institute of Technology, President of the Art Society of Pittsburgh and a member of the Board of Directors of the American Federation of Arts, died after a very brief illness of pneumonia, in Pittsburgh on November 11, 1913.

Mr. Hewlett was born in Brooklyn, on October 30, 1872. After graduating from Columbia University he went abroad and studied at the *École des*

Beaux Arts. For several years after his return he was associated with his brothers in the firm of Lord and Hewlett in New York. He was a student of music and of painting as well as of architecture. Five years ago he went to Pittsburgh as professor of decoration in the Carnegie Technical Schools, and in 1911 was appointed dean of the school of applied design. For two years he has also served as president of the Pittsburgh Art Society, the membership of which has been more than doubled during that time.

A memorial service was held by the faculty and students in the School of Technology, which Mr. Hewlett had done so much to upbuild, at the same time that the funeral was taking place in Brooklyn, and beautiful and fitting tribute was paid to the devoted service he had rendered as well as to his helpful and inspiring life. While never aggressive and of a retiring disposition Mr. Hewlett was an indefatigable worker and accomplished much in his efforts to advance the cause of art. His interest lay largely in the relation of industrial art to the fine arts and to life. At the most recent convention of the American Federation of Arts he read a valuable paper on the subject of "Relation of Industrial Art to Manufactures," which was published in the special Craftsman number of *ART AND PROGRESS*. At this convention last May, Mr. Hewlett was elected a member of the Board of Directors of the American Federation of Arts, and during the past fall, indeed, until his death, he actively demonstrated an interest in the welfare and development of this national organization, co-operating in its work in many helpful directions.

He is mourned by all those with whom he has come in contact, but the memory of his life will be a continuing influence within and even beyond the circle of his activities. "We who are left behind," Mr. Hamerschlag, director of the Institute of Technology, said at the memorial service, "must take up the burden and do his work as he would have done it." Adding, "It is worth a man's life to live and die as Dean Hewlett did."